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A SERIOUS
and
CANDID ADDRESS

to the
Methodist Societies,
in the
Halifax
and other
NEIGHBOURING CIRCUITS.

Halifax, September 1, 1797.

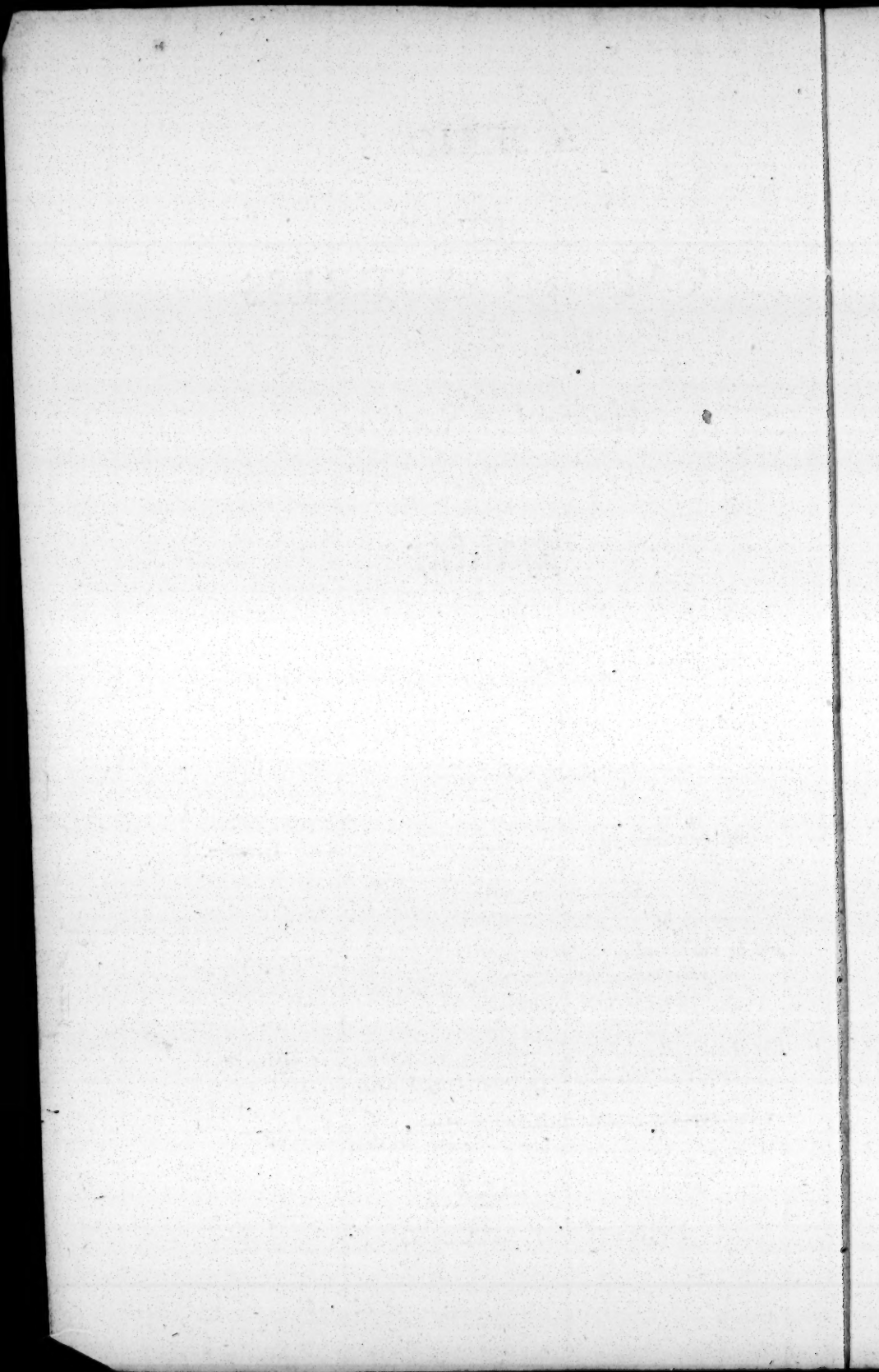
Rom. XIV.—Verses 13 & 17.

*Let us not therefore judge one another any more : but judge this
rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to
fall in his brother's way.*

*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; but righteous-
ness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

HALIFAX :
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A SERIOUS
and
Candid Address, &c.

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DEAR FRIENDS,

My mind has, for some time, been painfully exercised in contemplating the agitated state of our connexion in these parts.—It is not indeed to be expected, that in so large a body of people an entire uniformity of sentiment should prevail, particularly in points which have ever been the subject of controversy; but that men professing the same *general* views of religion, and members of the same society, should so far forget their duty as to revile and persecute one another, merely on account of a difference in opinion, is surely a just cause of astonishment and concern. It is such a conduct as this, which affords the enemies of Christianity matter of triumph, furnishes them with new arguments, and tends to render every professor of religion odious in their eyes.—It does not appear to me, that either controversy or division, considered simply in themselves, are contrary to the genius of the Gospel; for our judgments in many things, as well as our dispositions and means of information, must differ; but this is no reason why we should not love as brethren, and mutually strive to edify and assist one another by every means in our power.

I am aware, that amidst the violence of party and the clamour of debate, the voice of candour is seldom attended to.—At these times, appeals are made to the passions, invective is too often substituted for argument; and while some facts are carefully concealed from the view, others are as grossly misrepresented.—A moderate man, at such a crisis as this, is in danger of displeasing the violent on both sides, and his attempts to conciliate are too frequently regarded as the effects of indecision and pusillanimity.—I feel it however my duty, on the present occasion, to offer to your consideration, a few plain remarks, in which I would rather chuse to address myself to your judgment than to your feelings, to convince your understanding, rather than bias your affections.—And though they may not be approved by all, yet I trust they will not be wholly unacceptable to those who are truly solicitous for the revival of pure religion amongst us.

It was generally predicted by those who were no friends to Methodism, that on the decease of Mr. WESLEY, the people would no longer continue, as they had been, eminently one body, but that differences would arise among them which would divide the societies, and probably terminate by degrees, in the total extinction of the sect.—Mr. WESLEY had been the founder and father of his people, and for near half a century had governed them with undisputed authority.—But he reigned in their affections; they obeyed him from a principle of love; and even in those things in which their judgment differed from his, they submitted to his decisions, convinced of the purity of his motives and of the integrity of his heart.

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No wonder, therefore, that some great and important change should take place, whenever the Societies were deprived of the services of their highly esteemed Master.—It could hardly be otherwise than expected that some confusion and disorder should ensue, at so singular and awful a crisis.—But it pleased the Lord, who is the great head of his church, to disappoint the expectations of many, and to disperse the clouds that seemed to darken our horizon; for this event appeared to unite the preachers still more closely to one another, to re-kindle their zeal, and stimulate them to more arduous exertions in promoting the spread of the Gospel throughout the land.—They had the satisfaction of beholding the Societies, in various places, to increase; the same discipline was every where preserved, the same doctrines enforced, and by their instrumentality sinners continued to be converted, and believers exhorted to press forwards after a more full and complete salvation.—So far, therefore, were the body of the people from dwindling away, that there are now several thousands more in the society, than there were during any period of Mr. WESLEY's life.—And not only have the Methodists of late years become more numerous, but many, even amongst the rich and higher classes, have joined the Society, and assisted the cause by their property and influence.

But where the Devil cannot destroy, he will attempt to divide.—And this stratagem is but too often successful.—That it should be so in the present instance, will not appear at all surprizing to any who are but tolerably acquainted with the state of Methodism.

1. The

1. The Societies are composed of persons of various descriptions and characters.—Some have been brought up within the pale of the church, and may be strongly attached to the establishment. Some have been educated dissenters.—Some, probably, have been for a number of years deistically inclined, whilst others have lived in open rebellion against their God, in the practice of the most criminal excesses previous to their conversion.—Now, however, these may agree in what they term the essentials of religion, it is scarce probable that they should all divest themselves of the prejudices of education and custom, and have the same ideas respecting the administration of the ordinances, the form of church government, and the like.

2. The larger and more extensive any society becomes, so much the more difficult it is to keep that society together.—Improper persons may more readily gain admittance into it.—And it is not easy to conceive how much influence such a one might be capable of exerting, were he disposed to excite contention, or to promulgate his own opinions in opposition to those of his brethren.

3. The state of Methodism now is the reverse almost of what it was at first; originally, the Methodists were a poor, despised, persecuted people, and suffered many things on account of their religion.—Now, when a man becomes serious and enters the Society, it is often a means of his advancement in the world.—He forms new connexions, and these introduce him into business. And so far are they from being persecuted in general at present, that many amongst them are held

held in esteem, and looked upon as respectable characters, even by the men of the World.—I have heard of a Bishop who fled his country in the reign of queen Mary, and suffered very great hardships; on being, however, some time after restored to his dignity, he was asked by one, how he had sustained the heavy calamities he had been subjected to?—"I pray God," replies he, "I may sustain my prosperity as well."

Now, though the Methodists are very far from being either a rich or powerful body of people, yet they are both rich and powerful in comparison of what they were once.—And here lies the danger.—Whilst they were poor and insignificant, they were exempt from a variety of temptations.—It is hard to have riches and not set our hearts upon them; it is difficult to possess power, and not abuse it.

4. Though Mr. WESLEY himself was a strong advocate for his people attending and communicating at the church, yet he very well knew that many of the Preachers were dissenters in principle, and he foresaw, no doubt, that after his head was laid low, they would separate still more widely from the establishment, and succeed, in part, in instilling their sentiments into the minds of their hearers.

5. Some of the Societies, even during Mr. WESLEY's life, had the ordinance of the Lord's supper duly and constantly administered to them. This, it might have been expected, would naturally induce others to wish that the same privilege might be extended to them likewise.—Subsequent events have proved it to be the case.

6. Many of the Preachers have themselves,
(inadvertently

(inadvertently indeed, it may be presumed) contributed to divide the Societies, by publications circulated at different times in favour of religious liberty, in which they have argued for the right of private judgment and the freedom of public discussion.—By these writings, as well as from other sources, there is little doubt but that a great many who had before pinned their faith on other men's sleeves, were excited to think for themselves, to part with their prejudices, and to entertain more enlarged and liberal views of the state of the church, both with respect to doctrine and discipline.

7. But the dispute has not been confined to the subjects above alluded to; a still more serious cause of contention has prevailed of late, viz. an attempt to get Delegates from the people admitted into the Conference, or into the District Meetings, to assist and advise with the Preachers in their deliberations.—It has been said, the Conference has too much power, that it is but just that the people should have a voice in enacting those laws by which they are to be governed; and they imagine, that if the Preachers are truly solicitous for the welfare of the Societies at large, they can have no objection to be informed of the sentiments of the people, conveyed by proper representatives. They likewise contend, that many grievances exist under the present form of government, which might be speedily and effectually terminated by such a co-operation of Preachers and people.

Some addresses on this subject had been before presented to the Conference, and others were likewise made public in different circuits.—

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There was however, as yet, little appearance of their being attended with any effect.

Observing these opinions to gain ground, and fearing, that if the requisitions of the people had not some attention paid to them, there might ensue a division in the Society, several of the leading members in this circuit in January last, called a meeting of stewards, trustees, &c. for the purpose of considering the state of our Connexion, and seeing what they might be able to do to effect a reconciliation between the parties concerned. An address was accordingly voted, signifying their conviction of the expediency of a reform, and the propriety of admitting lay-delegates to the district meetings, and investing them with a power on these occasions equal to that of the Preachers. We thought that if this latter privilege were conceded, it would be a means eventually of redressing those grievances which might continue the subject of complaint, and that at least it would satisfy the minds of all moderate and reasonable men.

This address, with some others that had been published in different circuits to the same purpose, was presented to the conference assembled at Leeds in August. The propositions contained in it were read and discussed, and those respecting the admission of delegates were rejected. The Preachers however revised their rules, and made concessions of another kind which they judged more conducive to the peace and welfare of the Societies, and which they hoped would be sufficient to convince the people they did not wish, as some had insinuated, to rule them with a rod of iron.

Now, as I observed before, if we review these circumstances, (and many more might be adduced if necessary to corroborate our argument), is it to be wondered that a division has already taken place? Is it at all a matter of surprize that persons viewing things in different lights, and influenced by different motives and prejudices, should at length separate from one another, and each party form a distinct society?

But what then? are we to imagine that this division, tho' it should become still more general, is a prelude to the downfall of Methodism? Are we to suppose, that because we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul and Barnabas divided, one going one way and the other another, they were less useful or less devoted to God than before? Divisions in Churches are often like many other apparent evils, ultimately productive of good. What think you of the reformation begun in the reign of king Henry VIIIth? Do not we at this day enjoy the blessings and priviledges of this glorious event? But it was a *division* from the Church of Rome.

Again, did not Mr. Wesley separate from the Church of England, when he established his plan of itinerancy, and ordained ministers to preach the gospel in different parts of the kingdom? Did he not separate from the Church of England, when he administered the ordinances to his people in his own Chapels, and preached in many of them regularly in church hours?—And yet, who among us will question for a moment the utility of such a separation as this? Rather who among us could estimate the good such an event has been productive of? O how many
thousands

thousands have been converted under the sermons of the Methodists, in a barn, in a kitchen, in a street, nay by the road side, who never used to go to a place of worship before!

Once more. The best of men sometimes differ, and yet their differences may be over ruled by a superintending providence to some eminent advantage. Need I remind you of those two servants of God, Whitfield and Wesley? For some time we know they laboured in union one with the other. They afterwards separated upon a point of doctrine. But did this circumstance damp their exertions, or render their respective labours less successful? Did it abate the fervour of their zeal in the glorious cause in which they were engaged? Facts speak the contrary.

If this then be a just representation of things, give me leave to ask, why is all this hue and cry raised on account of the present division?—Wherefore all this semblance of sorrow and complaint?—You say, “We want peace and find “nothing but contention; we desire love and “confidence in one another, and behold little else “but distrust and jealousies; we wish to see “sinners converted, and lo! we find believers “quarrelling; we want, in short, to hear of the “revival of pure religion; and what do we observe but visionary reformists on one hand, and “dull, dead, formal professors on the other?”—But do you not here draw too exaggerated a sketch?—You do not certainly describe circumstances as they really are, but as your own misguided imaginations paint them? Surely you do not mean to insinuate that we have lost all our religion, that we have no truly pious persons amongst

us now.—I will not believe you guilty of so uncharitable a supposition.—That a considerable degree of confusion prevails, and that some of our friends, (and why should I exempt myself from the number) have lost at times much of the life of God in their souls by interfering too busily in these matters, I readily admit.—I lament also as much perhaps as any one, that others should have manifested on these occasions a temper and conduct utterly inconsistent with the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus.—But do not judge too rashly; do not censure indiscriminately.—And if indeed, my friends, you be what you call yourselves, lovers of peace, O beware of hurting the feelings of others; be tender of the reputation of your brethren; and where you cannot *approve*, leave it to the Judge of the earth to *condemn*.—Give every man credit, as far as circumstances will possibly admit, for the sincerity of his opinions and the purity of his motives.—And if moreover you be really solicitous for the revival of practical piety amongst us, let me entreat you, as the best proof you can afford of it, to *begin at home*.—Begin in your own closets and in your own families.—There let your light shine; there let heavenly tempers and dispositions first manifest themselves.—Then you will be the better enabled to appear with credit on the stage of public life; and whatever capacity you fill, your inviolable regard to justice and truth, will shut the mouth of the profane caviller, and secure to you the esteem of those whom you would wish to call your friends.—Example is often far more powerful than precept, and those are the best guardians of religion who are careful to recommend it by the

the amiableness of their lives as well as by the energy of their discourses.

Let us not then, my friends, hang down our faces and idly bewail the unhappiness of the times. Let us awake from our lethargy and rouse to action.—Let us consider what we can do for God, how we may best please and serve him, and by what means we may most effectually promote his cause in our day and generation.—And if we may be allowed sometimes in our retired moments to drop a tear of pity over the seemingly inauspicious state of our connexion, let us not rest there; let us look beyond to-day, to more pleasing scenes, and rejoice in the anticipation of future and perhaps not far distant good—But much depends upon ourselves; the world is regarding us with a jealous eye; our enemies are endeavouring to widen the breach; our hearts, if left unguarded, are ready to betray us into a thousand temptations; and our adversary the Devil, is exerting every artifice to disunite us in affection as well as in judgment.—There surely never was a time since the Methodists became a people, that required more vigilance and circumspection than the present.—Yet I will venture to propose one grand panacea, one sovereign remedy for all our distresses, real or imaginary, and which, if universally applied, will be universally successful.—And it is a very simple one; it is comprized in a few words, which however have a very extensive signification. “*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.*”—Are these words, my friends, deserving of your serious consideration, or are they not? Are they the words of a poor, frail,

frail, fallible mortal like yourselves, or are they the words of him who spake as never man spake? Let us endeavour to bestow some attention upon them, they are particularly applicable to our present situation; and I pray God to apply them by his spirit to our hearts and consciences.—“*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.*”

Suppose we examine ourselves a little by this rule.—Are we desirous that others should conduct themselves towards us in an open, honest, and liberal manner? Have *we* been careful to exhibit an example of this in *our* conduct towards *them*?—Again, are we unwilling that others should speak evil of us? And do we imagine that the characters of others are not equally dear to *them* as ours are to us? Do *we* then bridle our tongues that we speak not evil of *them*?

Do we expect lenity and forgiveness from others? and do *we* harbour resentment in our breasts? Do we hope to experience acts of kindness from our neighbour? and do *we* shut up our bowels of compassion towards *him*?

Ah! how deceitful is the heart of man! quick in discerning the least frailty in another; slow to believe any thing amiss in himself! hasty and vehement in censuring the vices of others; prompt in inventing excuses for his own!

But again—Have we attended to this rule when we have given way to intemperate expressions of anger and malice; when, in our representations, whether of men or facts, we have employed invective rather than argument, and have had recourse to personal reflexions instead of sober and candid discussion? Have we, my friends, attended
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to this rule, when instead of palliating, we have done all we could to aggravate the faults of our teachers, and attempted to depreciate an absent character in the estimation of those with whom we converse? Now if we are christians only so far as we follow Christ and obey his precepts, I fear we are not altogether what we should be.—Shall we call ourselves the disciples of him who did no violence, in whose mouth was no guile, while at the same time we are seeking to undermine the well earned reputation of some of the most respectable Ministers among us? 'Tis true, they have their weaknesses and their faults, but were we in their situation, should we like to have those faults exaggerated, or those weaknesses exposed? Is this doing as we would be done by?—Let us pause here, my friends, and weigh ourselves in the balance; and if we be found wanting, let us return to God with true contrition of heart, that we may find mercy thro' the blood of the Redeemer, and grace to mend our lives in future.

The want of candour and liberality of sentiment is not however confined to our people.—It is to be feared that all sects and denominations of christians have been more or less chargeable with it.—And a most humiliating consideration it is that disciples of the same Master, redeemed by the same blood, converted by the same spirit, and hastening to the same country, should fall out by the way, and instead of concentrating all their forces to oppose their common enemy, should indicate tempers and conduct necessarily destructive of all social union and affection.—It was never intended that we should all think alike; the scriptures themselves in many respects, seem to
favour

favour a diversity of sentiment, and hence we see one source of the different parties into which the christian world is divided.—Habit, education, the company we keep, the books we read, all conspire to produce a variety of opinion —Christianity is not merely a matter of speculation; it consists neither in forms nor creeds; neither in the multitude of our prayers, nor the largeness of our professions.—The religion of the Bible is a religion of love; it publishes the glad tidings of salvation to a ruined world; it proclaims the love of God to sinners, and enjoins on our parts the exercise of love and every act of benevolence to one another.

It is this love which constitutes a christian. You may be a very able disputant, a very strong champion for orthodoxy, and at the same time have no title to the character of a christian.

“What can a fierce believer reply to a modest christian uttering such soliloquy as this?
 “—You have a fine genius; but you persecute me!—You are sound in the faith; but your faith or your something works hatred to me!—You are an elegant orator; but you slander me!—
 “You sing with harmony, and pray with energy; but you increase your felicity by crucifying me!
 “—Think seriously, would the King of kings, your Lord and mine, the pattern of every good work, would he treat me thus?—and would you wish he should conduct himself to you, as you do to me?”—

It was perhaps such a faith as this which Mr. Pope alluded to, when he composed that celebrated couplet;—

“For modes of faith, let graceless zealots fight,
 “His can’t be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

When

When I first entered into your society, I imagined I was joining a people cemented together in the closest bonds of affection and harmony. I did not conceive that strife and dissention could have ever prevailed amongst the subjects of the Prince of peace.—Had I been told that I should there meet with any thing like jealousies, evil surmises, shy looks and angry words, I should have given no credit to the assertion; I should have treated it as a scurrilous and unfounded insinuation.—But it is by degrees only that we become acquainted with the evils of our hearts.—When we are first made happy in the pardoning love of God, we appear dead to every emotion of ill-will and anger, of pride and resentment; we mount up, as it were, on the wings of an eagle and sing for joy, being lightened of the burden of our sins. The recent experience of the divine favour, and the lively joy which results from a consciousness of the forgiveness of all our past offences, constrain us also to forgive the greatest injuries done to us, to pray for our enemies, and to bless those who despitefully use us and persecute us.—At these seasons we may indeed be said to be dead unto sin and alive unto righteousness.—We detest and shun every appearance of vice, that we know to be such, and we ardently love and diligently pursue every thing virtuous and amiable.—But after this heavenly rapture hath somewhat subsided, and particularly when trials come on which call for the exercise of patience, self-denial and the like, then we find the remains of the old Adam, like a traitor, lurking within; we begin to see a little further into ourselves, and to groan beneath a sense of our inbred depravities.

—We then probably detect ourselves in having given way to unwatchfulness, to spiritual pride, to vanity, to self-will.—And unless these discoveries lead us to a throne of grace, to implore strength to overcome them, we shall soon cease to adorn our profession, we shall lose not only our comfort but our confidence, and shall too justly merit the appellation of barren cumberers of the ground.

Has this in any degree been the case with us?—Alas! have we not, more than once or twice, dishonoured our calling by unholy tempers and unkind expressions?—Have we not sometimes been so absorbed in poring over the faults of our brethren, that we have almost forgotten we had any of our own?—Have we not drunk too deeply into the spirit of controversy?—Have we never argued as if we judged every one fallible but ourselves?—Have we not been too fond of introducing subjects of inferior moment in common conversation, when we should have been endeavouring to strengthen each other's faith, to soothe each other's sorrow, to help each other's joy?—And what has all this arisen from?—Truly from the declining state of religion in our own souls.—We have neglected opportunities of prayer, or we have been dull and lifeless in the performance of it: we have been unwatchful of our best interests, and our own hearts have taken the advantage and betrayed us.

I address you, my friends, the more feelingly, because I have been a sufferer on these occasions myself.—How apt is one extreme to produce, or rather to be succeeded by another!—There was a time when I thought the Methodist Preachers almost spotless as angels.—Had I since then
yielded

yielded to the caprice and credulity of my own mind, and believed every malicious story circulated respecting them, I might have been brought to esteem them little better than a set of designing hypocrites.—O how unjust and illiberal is it to brand with appellations like these, men who have spent the prime and vigour of their lives in the most active and important services; men who in the prosecution of their object, have sacrificed their home and their friends, subjected themselves to nearly every temporal inconvenience, uniformly evincing a contempt of danger, reproach and suffering! men, who in the true spirit of self-denial have gone forth, as it were, with their lives in their hands, preaching the gospel to every creature, and calling sinners to repentance!—They have not deserved this at our hands.

But let me ask, what is it that has made them so offensive in the eyes of some amongst us?—What have they been doing to get all this ill will? Have they been guilty of any gross immorality?—No—Have they been preaching doctrines which they did not believe to be true?—No—Have they been deceiving the people with fair promises of what they never intended to perform?—No—What then?—Why truly, it has been discovered that they are a little too tenacious of power.—They are unwilling to resign that authority to the people, which they derived conjointly from Mr. Wesley, and which they have exercised since his death. *

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“ * For my own part, I have no doubt but the leading
 “ men among the Methodists, were influenced originally
 “ by none but the best of motives—a general concern for
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And is it not possible, think you, that, some of them at least, may have been actuated by pure and disinterested motives in this?—May they not really have been persuaded, that the interests of the society at large required them to keep this power in their own hands? and that the conceding so much of it to the people, might be a means of introducing one innovation after another, till the original plan of Methodism were entirely changed?—"But allowing even this to be the case," you alledge again,—“that they have evidenced a spirit in several of their late publications very incompatible with the nature of their profession as ministers of the Gospel of Christ.—You allow that the best of mankind in an unguarded moment, may be led to utter an hasty expression, or give way to a transient emotion of anger and the like; but that men professing to live under the influences of the holy spirit of God, should deliberately sit down and commit to paper and afterwards to the press, sentiments which evidently bear the marks of a proud, vindictive, dogmatizing spirit, is a con-

“the souls of men.—Nothing else, I think, can account for their conduct, as they were then circumstanced.—But finding themselves, by degrees, at the head of a large body of people, and in possession of considerable power and influence, they must not have been MEN, if they had not felt the love of power gratified in such a situation: And they must have been MORE THAN MEN, if their subsequent conduct had not been more or less influenced by it.”—

[Dr. PRIESTLEY's Letters.]

tradition

“tradition which you cannot reconcile on any
“known principles of scripture or reason.”

This, I grant you, is an observation of some weight; we will bestow some attention upon it, and I think I have stated the objection it contains in its full force.

There are, I apprehend, few even amongst the most approved christians, who have attained to that degree of grace, as upon *all* occasions, to regulate their tempers and morals according to the perfect law of God.—And tho’ they may sometimes err and depart from the purity of the Gospel, we must believe them nevertheless to be men truly acceptable in the sight of God, and properly qualified to fill their stations as ministers.—Because they are not *perfect*, are we to allow them *no* merit?—Because in many things they might have acted *better*, are we not to respect them when they act *well*?—Or because they are men of like passions with ourselves, and like us have their faults, are we to cast a shade of oblivion over their virtues?—Let us revert to the old rule, and ask ourselves, whether we would chuse, were we in their situation and they in ours, that they should behave in this manner to us.—Let us remember that,

“To err is human, to forgive divine.”

* By introducing this term here, no one I trust will infer that I mean by it, any action meritorious on our parts. I am well aware that in *us* dwelleth no good thing, and that when we do good, not only the action itself, but the very disposition to do it, proceeds from the agency of the divine spirit—the merit therefore is God’s alone.

But

But again—Have they their faults? so have we. Do they need forgiveness? and do not we?—Have they done any thing displeasing or offensive to us?—Are we sure we have never given them any provocation?—Mark here an argument for the exercise of candour.—God is merciful and long suffering towards us; and shall we be censorious and implacable towards another?—If he bears with our infirmities, is it not a lesson to us to cast a veil of love over those of our neighbour?—O for more of that charity, without which all our professions are an empty parade, all our other acquirements as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!

From what has been said, I would not be understood to stand forth as the apologist of vice of any kind or in any degree.—I know the preachers have their failings; I grant many of them have both written and spoken of late in an unbecoming spirit.—In these moments, I allow they have deviated from their professed principles.—But were we in the same critical situation in which they have been and still are, how do we know that we should have conducted ourselves better?—Let us then pause before we pass sentence, lest in judging them we condemn ourselves.

But reproof, of whatever kind it be, in order to have the desired end, should be given in a proper manner.—You must convince a man you love him and have his interest at heart, before you attempt to reform him.—For where he sees you are actuated by a principle of affection, and by a real desire to do him good, he will be more likely to listen to your remonstrances and to profit by your advice.—It is in such a spirit as this that we should always address our senior brethren, particularly

larly our teachers, when we observe any thing reprehensible in them; and had we attended a little more to this caution, we should probably have succeeded better in the attainment of the objects we proposed.—Such language as the following best becomes us on these occasions.

“ Respected friends, we call to mind with grateful acknowledgements your past services and long labours in promoting the best of causes. We thank God, on your behalf, for having made you instrumental in advancing his kingdom in the world.—We esteem you highly for your work’s sake, and can have no doubt but that your crown of rejoicing will be great in the day of the Lord.—But we entreat you to bear with us while we point out wherein we conceive you have erred, and we trust you will give us a patient hearing, and not regard us less your friends for dealing honestly and plainly with you.—We give you full credit for the purity of your design and the sincerity of your zeal, when you first engaged in your sacred calling.—We believe you had solely in view the glory of God in the salvation of souls.—Your eye was single, and consequently your whole body full of light.—Your faith was strong, your hope lively and full of immortality, and you possessed that charity which suffereth long and is kind, is not easily provoked, is not puffed up, thinketh no evil, but beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things endureth all things.”

“ Permit us to enquire, is it thus with you now? Are you now as patient of injuries as you were then?—Are you now as willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and his Gospel, as you were then?

“ —Have

“ —Have you the same singleness of heart, the
 “ same disinterested zeal as formerly?—We grant
 “ you have been placed in peculiar circumstances,
 “ and very likely we, in your situation, might not
 “ have conducted ourselves with equal circum-
 “ spection.

“ But have you manifested no love of power?
 “ —Have you been influenced by no motives but
 “ such as are pure, noble, and generous?—Have
 “ you not rather been too violent in your tempers,
 “ too trifling in your conversation, nay, too pointed
 “ in your pulpits on some occasions?—and instead
 “ of returning good for evil and blessing those who
 “ have slandered you, have you not returned railing
 “ for railing?—Have you employed your pens in
 “ defending and unfolding the grand doctrines of
 “ Christianity, or have you made the Press a vehicle
 “ for maintaining your own particular opinions?—
 “ Or if you have thought yourselves called upon to
 “ maintain them, have you done it in the spirit of
 “ meekness and moderation, abstaining from every
 “ thing calculated to irritate and inflame the minds
 “ of your opponents?—Have you shewn that you
 “ could bear a little ill-treatment without resenting
 “ it, that you could submit to have your motives
 “ misconstrued, and your characters defamed with-
 “ out harbouring malice in your breasts?—If your
 “ cause be good, if your present views of things be
 “ just and scriptural, why do you so much dread
 “ their overthrow?—and if this be not the case,
 “ every violent measure taken to defend them will
 “ only accelerate their downfall.—We need not
 “ remind you of what former experience has
 “ repeatedly proved, that opposition generally
 “ defeats its own ends; whereas there are few who
 “ will

" will not yield to persuasion, or be won over
 " by love.—What! if some of your brethren,
 " have seceded from you?—will you re-
 " spect them less upon this account merely?—
 " Would you deny them the privilege you claim
 " for yourselves, viz. the right of private judge-
 " ment, the right of thinking, determining and
 " acting for themselves?—And because they see
 " many things in a light different from you, and
 " pursue a line of conduct agreeable thereunto,
 " shall you represent them as litigious disaffected
 " characters, as men who are better out of your
 " society than in it?—Many of them you have
 " known to be persons of deep piety, of approved
 " abilities, of amiable manners; and many of them
 " have borne the heat and burden of the day,
 " like yourselves; and like you too, have laboured
 " successfully in the vineyard of the Lord.—Do
 " not then treat them as enemies; if they have
 " deviated from you in some particulars, if they
 " no longer act in union with you as formerly,
 " yet still they have not deserted their old Master
 " Jesus Christ; they have not relinquished their
 " labours, nor, we trust, ceased to be useful.—
 " Ah, no—they are still embarked in the same
 " cause, they are still fellow-soldiers with your-
 " selves, fighting under the same banner, and in-
 " viting sinners to accept the same Saviour.—We
 " beseech you, therefore, to lay aside all bitterness
 " and wrath, all clamour and evil speaking; and
 " if you must contend, let it be a contest for use-
 " fulness.—Let the question be, who shall best
 " fulfil the duties of their sacred function, who
 " shall most adorn the gospel of God their Saviour.
 " Thus you will defy the attacks of infidels, and

D

" silence

“ silence the calumnies of those who would exult
 “ to see you fall by each other’s hands.—Thus
 “ you will have the satisfaction of beholding reli-
 “ gion spreading its healing branches far and
 “ wide around you; the barren wilderness will
 “ become a fruitful field, the desert will rejoice
 “ and blossom as the rose, the parched ground
 “ shall become a pool, and the thirsty land
 “ springs of water; then shall you see the glory
 “ of the Lord and the excellency of our God.”

And how shall I address myself to you my fellow members at this particular crisis?—It is a good thing to turn from folly, and to devote ourselves to the service of God; and it is peculiarly happy for those who begin in their youth to remember their Creator.—But when we have set out upon a journey what avail is it, except we go forwards; nay what doth it profit us, unless we endure to the end?—Are we aware of the difficulties and obstacles we shall meet with in our progress?—Rather, my friends, have not many of us already suffered from this quarter?—When we were first converted to God, were we not full of faith, of zeal and love?—Was it not our meat and our drink to do the work of him who had so marvellously called us out of darkness into light? O with what pleasure we then ran the way of his commandments! with what delight we entered his courts, and sung his praises! with what comparative indifference we viewed the things of time and sense!

When you conversed, was it not upon subjects which tended to edification in piety and virtue?—When you read, was it not in those books only which were calculated to inform your understandings,

understandings, to deaden your affections to the world, and encrease your zeal for God?—And when you were alone in your closets, did not your moments glide pleasantly along, whilst you were engaged in secret acts of pious meditation and fervent prayer to the author of all your mercies? At that time your eyes were too steadily fixed upon the scriptures of truth, to permit you to behold the faults and imperfections of your fellow-mortals.—Your ears were too eagerly intent in listening to the joyful sound of the gospel to suffer you to hearken to the voice of slander.—Your tongues then found better employment than that of repeating and circulating reports injurious to the character of others; and the very frame and disposition of your minds were such as to incline you to think evil of none, and to hope the best of all.—And with all this, did you not possess a peace and satisfaction in your own breasts; an inward calm, an holy joy, which you would not have exchanged for all the treasures of the east?—You could indeed feelingly adopt the language of the poet and say;—

I.

JESUS, I love thy charming name,
 'Tis music to my ear;
 Fain would I sound it forth so loud,
 That heaven and earth might hear.

II.

Yes, thou art precious to my soul,
 My transport and my trust,

D 2

Jesus

Jewels to thee are fordid toys,
And gold is fordid dust.

III.

All my capacious pow'rs can wish,
In thee most richly meet;
Nor to my eyes is light so dear,
Nor friendship half so sweet.

But is this the case with you now?—Or rather what progress have you made in the divine life?—Are you nearer salvation now than when you first believed?

These are solemn enquiries, and I myself am equally interested in them as you.—Let us then consider our ways and examine the ground on which we stand.

The Methodists are a people who are favoured with peculiar privileges, and we read that to whom much is given, of him will much be required.—Where the Lord sows there also will he expect to reap.—If he send us able and zealous ministers, and afford us many and various opportunities of waiting upon him both in public and in private, is it not that we may daily renew our spiritual strength?

If he give us talents, it is not that we may bury them in the earth; if he justify us freely by his grace, it is not to encourage our indolence, or to preclude the necessity of our own vigorous exertions in future.—Let us ever remember that the life of a christian is a progressive one.—We should consider ourselves as having entered into the school of Christ, and as having a new lesson
of

of faith, love and obedience to learn every day.—We may be assured, that unless we are going forwards, we are measuring back our steps to earth again.—There is no standing still.—O what need is there for us to provoke each other to love and good works!—These are the invariable fruits of a living faith; and it is by our fruits alone that we evidence the sincerity of our profession.—I fear many of us seek to enjoy the *comforts* of religion without practising its *duties*.—And this is a grand mistake, and is no doubt one cause which often hinders the growth of grace in the soul.—As long as we are living to God, so long we may expect the divine consolations of his spirit; but if we forsake the path of duty, if our minds and affections wander after other objects, we are no longer entitled to his promises, we can no longer claim his favour or protection.—Let us therefore, my dear brethren, be determined to lay aside every weight, to press through every obstacle, to resign every idol that separates us from our God.—Do we call him Father, and shall we not follow him as dear children?—Have we acknowledged him for our Captain, and shall we not acquit ourselves as good soldiers?—Do we profess ourselves his disciples, and are we not willing to bear his cross and to drink of his cup?—What does our Lord himself say?—Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Lastly, let us endeavour to preserve as far as in us lies, the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.—If we differ in judgement, it is no reason why we should be disunited in affection.—Let us
each

each follow that line of conduct which we believe to be right, without endeavouring to force our opinions upon others.—Much less should we cast unkind reflections upon those who dissent from us, or who from a point of conscience have left our connexion.—This is one species of persecution amongst others; and let us remember that the very moment we begin to persecute, that moment we cease to be christians.—We may assume the mask of piety, we may appear full of holy zeal, be very active in our prayer meetings, and very lively and even useful in our classes; and yet, unless we have with all this, the mind, the meek, the patient, the humble, the compassionate mind that was in Christ, it is to be feared that we shall come far short of that holiness, without which we are expressly told we cannot see the Lord.—We may deceive man and ourselves likewise with the shadow of religion, but God searches our hearts and knows the secret springs of every action; he knows who are his and who are not, and he will judge every man according to his works.

May the Great Head of the church bless and protect every congregation of his people; preside over their councils, shine upon their path, lead them on from grace to grace, from victory to victory, perfect them in love, and at last receive them to himself in glory, where they shall shine as the stars in the firmament for ever and ever!

